ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

M. W. (Monte) Bianchi

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STATUS OF INTERVIEW:
OPEN FOR RESEARCH

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Interview Conducted and Edited by:
Donald B. Seney
California State University-Sacramento
For the Bureau of Reclamation's
Newlands Project Oral History Series

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MONTE BIANCHI

INTERVIEWER: DR. DONALD B. SENEY

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Introduction

In 1988, Reclamation began to create a history program. While headquartered in Denver, the history program was developed as a bureau-wide program.

One component of Reclamation's history program is its oral history activity. The primary objectives of Reclamation's oral history activities are: preservation of historical data not normally available through Reclamation records (supplementing already available data on the whole range of Reclamation's history); making the preserved data available to researchers inside and outside Reclamation.

In the case of the Newlands Project, Reclamation designed a special research project between 1994 and 2008 to take an all around look at one Reclamation project. Professor Donald B. Seney of the Government Department at California State University - Sacramento (now emeritus and living in South Lake Tahoe, California) undertook this work. The Newlands Project, while a small- to medium-sized Reclamation project, represents a microcosm of issues found throughout Reclamation: transportation of water over great distances; three Native American groups with sometimes conflicting interests; private entities with competitive water rights; many governmental entities with basic water concerns; Fish and Wildlife Service programs competing for water for endangered species in Pyramid Lake and for viability of the Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge to the east of Fallon, Nevada; and Reclamation's original water user, the Truckee-Carson

Irrigation District, having to deal with modern competition for the water that originally flowed to farms and ranches in its community.

The senior historian of the Bureau of Reclamation developed and directs the oral history program. Questions, comments, and suggestions may be addressed to the senior historian.

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Oral History Interview
Monte Bianchi

Seney: My name's Donald Seney, and I'm talking with Monte Bianchi at his home in Carson City, and today is June 15, 1994.[1]

Good afternoon, Mr. Bianchi.

Bianchi: Good afternoon.

Seney: I want to start, as I said, by asking you to tell me about your family life; where you were born, what your parents did.

Parents Immigrated from Italy and Later Owned a Farm

Bianchi: My parents were immigrants from Italy and came over here.

Seney: What part of Italy?

Bianchi: The Tuscany area: Luca, if that means anything,

1. The deed of gift for this interview was signed on June 16, 1994.

which is near Pisa. My dad came over here in 1906 and sent for my mother about six months later and she arrived here in the spring of 1907.

Seney: What did he do here?

Bianchi: He came over and he went to work on the farms in the area and . . .

Seney: Meaning here in the Carson City area of Nevada?

Bianchi: No, down on the headwaters of the East Walker River is the first place that he landed, working for another Italian family. And then from there on, he was able to save up enough money to start his own operations as a farmer from then on.

Seney: Where did he farm?

Bianchi: In the Mason Valley and Smith Valley areas.

Seney: Where are those?

Bianchi: The Mason Valley is [near][2] Yerington. Hayden is the county seat of Lyon County, but Yerington is one of the main towns, and Smith Valley is the adjoining valley. Smith Valley irrigates from the West Walker River and Mason Valley irrigates from East Walker and the main stem of the Walker River.

Seney: What did he grow? What kind of farmer was he?

Bianchi: Mostly potatoes, and then he had a little dairy. He got some cows, and my brother and I used to

2. Note that in the text of these interviews, as opposed to headings, information in parentheses, ( ), is actually on the tape. Information in brackets, [ ], has been added to the tape either by the editor to clarify meaning or at the request of the interviewee in order to correct, enlarge, or clarify the interview as it was originally spoken. Words in some interviews have sometimes been struck out by editor or interviewee in order to clarify meaning or eliminate repetition. In the case of strikeouts, that material has been printed at 50% density to aid in reading the interviews but assuring that the struckout material is readable.

The transcriber and editor have removed some extraneous words such as false starts and repetitions without indicating their removal. The meaning of the interview has not been changed by this editing.

have to get up early in the morning and go milk those cows.

Seney: How many did he have?

Bianchi: Well, I think the biggest herd we ever had was maybe about twenty-five which is no herd at all these days!

Seney: Yeah, unless you're milking them yourself, right?

Bianchi: Well, that's right. In those days, we didn't *have* a milking machine.

Seney: And he was the beneficiary of irrigation on his farm?

Family Didn't Understand the Irrigation Process in the Early Days

Bianchi: Yes, at that time we really didn't understand what the irrigation process was–I mean as far as who was entitled to the water and all that. You just

called the watermaster and said you wanted to irrigate, and he'd go up and turn the water in. And if water was short, he'd tell you you'd have to take your turn or whatever.

Seney: And this water came out of the Walker River?

Bianchi: Yes.

Seney: And who controlled it? Who was the . . .

Walker River Irrigation District and Its Facilities

Bianchi: The Walker River Irrigation District which is an entity headquartered in Yerington.

Seney: Ah!

Bianchi: They control the waters from Topaz Lake, which is a natural lake but it was increased in capacity by man, and then there's Bridgeport Reservoir which is a reservoir that they built. I think the

Walker River Irrigation District came into being about 1924 (Seney: I see.) when they built those two reservoirs.

Seney: Excuse me, when did your dad start farming? What year did he begin farming in?

Bianchi: I think about 1908–1907 or 1908.

Seney: So he was there before the irrigation system came in?

Bianchi: Yes, yes. He just took the water out of the river.

Seney: He had his own irrigation.

Bianchi: I'm sure there were some . . . (sigh) No doubt the ditches had been laid out and the canals that carried the water to the ditches. But yeah, I think he was there before the project was.

Seney: Do you remember it? When were you born?

Bianchi: In 1920.

Seney: In 1920, so you obviously are not going to remember those early days. (Bianchi: No.) Did he talk about irrigating before the district came into being?

Bianchi: Not really. That's one thing, like a lot of other things, that I've kicked myself around for not asking a *lot* of questions of folks, because I don't know an awful lot about what they did in the old country and why they came over here.

Seney: Sure, sure.

Bianchi: Something I've regretted.

Seney: Well, your children will have this record, because I'm going to ask you a lot of questions about what you've done and you'll get a book published on

this.

Bianchi: I will?! When will that be?

Seney: Oh, I think probably it will take about a year to produce. It will be a very nice bound volume of our conversation. (Bianchi: That'll be great.) Yeah. And you don't know then if he had rights to that water or if he bought those rights, or how all that happened?

Bianchi: My dad always was a lease-type farmer–he never did buy a farm. So whoever owned the farm, was no doubt owner of the rights. I assume that's why he never did have a real good understanding of how you went about to get the water. You just called the watermaster and that's all he knew.

Seney: And when [he] wanted to irrigate, he would

irrigate.

Bianchi: That's right.

Seney: And you grew up on the farm, huh?

Bianchi: Yes I did.

Seney: And besides milking cows?

Bianchi: Mostly in Smith Valley.

Seney: Where is Smith Valley?

Bianchi: The water irrigates from the West Walker.

Seney: What's the major town in Smith Valley? Is that Yerington in Smith Valley?

Bianchi: No, Yerington's in Mason Valley. Wellington is– if you want to call it the major town there.

Seney: Is that the closest town to your farm?

Bianchi: Yes.

Seney: I see.

Bianchi: He farmed several farms in Smith Valley. Like I say, he always leased.

Seney: How successful a farmer was he? Of course that depends a lot on the weather and a lot of other things.

The Depression

Bianchi: He must have been fairly good, he raised five kids. I don't remember ever being hungry.

Seney: That's a good sign!

Bianchi: And in the Depression, I might add. I was the youngest, born in 1920, and the kids were all growing up during the Depression.

Seney: Do you remember that period particularly?

Bianchi: Somewhat. Not as the Depression. I remember the times.

Seney: Yeah, well then what is your memory of?

Bianchi: On the farm I don't think any of us knew it was a depression. I think you probably heard that before.

Seney: Yes I have, right.

Bianchi: We didn't have an awful lot, but we didn't know it was a depression. We always ate fairly well. Sometimes Mother would have to patch our clothes, darn our socks, which is never done any more.

Seney: Yeah, that's right.

Bianchi: But we always had water to wash with and kept clean. But as far as hard times like I think they might have had in the cities, we knew nothing about that.

Seney: Tell me a little about your dad. What kind of guy was he?

Bianchi: Well, of course, I'm pretty well prejudiced. (Seney: Well, that's good.) Something I try to emulate, his great-grandfather and the father, he helped an awful lot of the Italians that came over after him. I know quite a few that he loaned money to and he never saw it again, but he was always on good terms with everybody. It's kind of hard to describe your own father without being a little emotional.

Seney: That's all right.

Bianchi: But he loved his family, and especially his grandchildren.

Seney: Was he a very talkative guy? Did he say much?

Quiet?

Bianchi: He was fairly quiet, unless he got around some of his countrymen. I'll have to tell you a story if we can divert a little.

Seney: Sure. Please do.

Bianchi: I went to Italy–my wife and I went to Europe. We went to Norway where her people are from, then we went down to Italy where I'm from. And she called her daughter one night and she told our daughter, she says, "Maria, you wouldn't know Dad. Since we got here in Italy, you'd be surprised at how much he really talks. You know you've always known him as a quiet sort of guy. Since we've gotten here he's just expounded," because I know the language, I speak the

language. And our daughter says, "Mother, maybe that should tell you something." (laughter) She said, "I can't get in a word edgewise." Then our daughter says, "Well, you know, maybe that should tell you something." (laughter) She doesn't speak, she doesn't know the language.

Seney: Obviously you spoke Italian at home.

Bianchi: I'm kind of the same way, I'm kind of quiet and that's the way he was. He was pretty quiet.

Seney: What was your mother like?

Bianchi: She was very quiet. She was the old country wife that the man was the head of the family. Dad did all the shopping. She was a very good cook, she did the cooking. She worked hard. In those days we had crews to work the hay fields and digging

potatoes and all that, and she had to cook for a lot of crews.

Seney: Did he raise his own hay for his herd, his dairy cattle?

Bianchi: Oh yeah, yeah.

Seney: Pretty self-sufficient farm?

Bianchi: Yeah. I don't remember if we ever bought anything. We raised some wheat and barley on one of the places that we lived on. I guess maybe we would buy pasture land in the summertime sometimes. But as far as feeding hay, we raised all that ourselves.

Seney: Did you enjoy farming?

Bianchi: Yes I did. But I think it was pretty typical in the late 30s for young men to go out and seek their

fortune, which I did.

Seney: What did you do?

Moved to the San Francisco Bay Area

Bianchi: I went down to the Bay Area. I had a sister that was living down there then, and got a job down there.

Seney: What were you doing?

Worked as an Apprentice Machinist

Bianchi: I started out working for California Packing Company in their warehouse, and I didn't like that too well. Then I finally got a job in a machine shop, and I was an apprentice machinist at the time that the war started up.

Seney: Whereabouts in the Bay Area was this?

Bianchi: The machine shop was in Emoryville. When I

worked for California Packing it was in Oakland.

Seney: So you lived in the East Bay?

In the Air Force During World War II

Bianchi: Yes. When the war came along, I was ripe for the draft so I went to work for Uncle Sam for four years.

Seney: Which branch of the service were you in?

Bianchi: I was in the Air Force.

Seney: Ah! Did you see active service?

Bianchi: Yes.

Seney: Whereabouts?

Bianchi: The European theater.

Seney: Doing what?

Bianchi: I was a mechanic and ground crew with a fighter group, fighter pilots–fighter planes, B-47s.

Seney: First in England and then in Europe?

Bianchi: Yes, then in France and on into Germany.

Seney: Yeah. Tell me a little about your wartime experience.

Bianchi: Oh gosh, there's not an awful lot to tell. Well, I was pre-Pearl Harbor to begin with.

Seney: Oh, you enlisted before Pearl Harbor?

Bianchi: I didn't enlist, I was drafted.

Seney: Oh, you were drafted. (laughter)

Bianchi: And I had a friend that was drafted ahead of me. When I was drafted, they gave us a choice of signing up for whatever service we wanted, and we could choose our branch, if we signed up for three years. I told my friend about this and he said, "You're crazy. This thing is going to be

over in another six months." Well I reminded him of that five years later. (laughter) And incidentally, instead of twenty-one dollars a month, we got thirty dollars a month if we enlisted for three years.

Seney: Oh, that was a considerable difference!

Attended Mechanic's School in Biloxi and Then Worked on P-47s

Bianchi: Oh yeah, yeah. And the first thing they did was send me to mechanic's school down in Biloxi, Mississippi. From there, I specialized in, I think, propellers.

Seney: What was Biloxi, Mississippi like? Did you spend much time in the town?

Bianchi: I was there the day Pearl Harbor was bombed, and I just about didn't get back on the base because a

friend of mine and I went off the base in civilian clothes–at that time, we could wear our civilian clothes, yet–and we came back and we spent quite a bit of time at the MP [military police] gate. And we didn't have our dog tags with us, so somebody had to identify us before we could get back in. So I spent about nine months there, I guess, at that school, and then went up to Buffalo, New York, for the Bell . . . What was that called? That's where I specialized in propeller . . . .

Seney: Is that what your job was, to maintain the propellers?

Bianchi: No, there's another thing. I don't know why they sent us to specialist school but anyway, from there on . . .

Seney: It was the Army! (chuckles)

Bianchi: Yeah, right. That was typical. And from there I went down to Orlando, Florida, where we went into a regular group–a fighter group–and I spent about two years there before we went overseas. We went to a little place called Lymington, England, which is across the Channel from the Welsh. Right across from the Isle of Wight, is where it is.

Seney: And you worked exclusively on P-47s?

Bianchi: Yes.

Seney: That's a fairly long-range fighter isn't it?

Bianchi: Well, . . . There's the P-40s. In the beginning, we were working on P-40s. But when we went overseas, just *before* we went overseas, we got the

P-47s.

Seney: Is there a big difference between them?

Bianchi: Well, yes. The P-40 is an in-line engine and the P-47 is a radial, big Continental radial engine.

Seney: What you learned on the in-line engine, did that do you much good on the radial engine?

Bianchi: Not really, except the fundamentals of an internal combustion engine.

Seney: Are you mechanically inclined? Did they have you in the right slot?

Bianchi: I think so. I enjoyed that. I must have had something that they saw that was necessary for a mechanic.

Seney: What kind of problems did you run into with these P-47s? Were they pretty good airplanes?

Bianchi: Yes they were. They were the workhorse of the Air Force.

Seney: Well, they were pretty long-range fighters weren't they? Couldn't they come at bombers quite a distance?

Bianchi: They were long range if they . . . They could carry a belly tank and two wing tanks, with either bombs or gasoline. If they had the gasoline, of course, they could go a *long* way. But ordinarily, they were used for short-range bombing--then they carried, I think, 1,000-pound bombs on each wing and a 500-pound bomb on the belly, or whatever combination they needed.

Seney: What was it like to be a ground crew mechanic for fighter pilots?

". . . you always wondered if your plane was going to come back, and your pilot. You got pretty attached to your pilot a lot of times. . . ."

Bianchi: Well, you always wondered if your plane was going to come back, and your pilot. You got pretty attached to your pilot a lot of times.

Seney: And you worked on one plane only?

Bianchi: Yes. Well, if you were the crew chief, which I eventually became the crew chief on the P-47, I had one particular plane and my crew would change probably, but I had that one plane.

Seney: Was that the military system to kind of make people more conscientious? Did they want you to develop a rapport with the pilot so that maybe you'd be a little more careful, do you Think?

Military Didn't Want Fraternization of Enlisted Men with Officers, but Pilots Always Wanted to Be

Friends with Their Crew Chief

Bianchi: Well, I'm not sure. I think there might have been some of that, but of course the military never did want you to fraternize with the officers, which, when we got overseas, that rule went by the wayside. (Seney: Did it?) Because one thing, the officers–all the pilots were officers–they wanted to be darn sure that their crew chief was a friend of theirs. Such things as, for instance, my pilot didn't drink, and when he'd come back from a mission, they were always given a shot of whiskey if they wanted it. Well, he would just pour it in the bottle and when the bottle was full why I was the recipient. (laughter)

Seney: Did you service his plane for a long period of

time?

Bianchi: Yes. All the time that we were over there, and I was over there eighteen months.

Seney: So in other words, you never lost a pilot?

Bianchi: No. Never did.

Seney: I would think that would be kind of tough standing there waiting. (Bianchi: Oh yeah.) And he doesn't come back.

Bianchi: Yeah. He came through okay. Got shot up a few times, but always came back.

Seney: There was a lot of difference, wasn't there, between the bomber pilots and the fighter pilots in terms of how dangerous it was? Wasn't it much more dangerous for the bomber pilots?

"Oftentimes, pilots didn't come back. The crew chiefs really–it was pretty tough. . . ."

Bianchi: Oh, I think so. Naturally, the bomber is a little slower, not as maneuverable, and I think the enemy concentrated on them probably more because they were an easier target. The only time the fighters got in trouble was when the enemy fighters were in the area and then they would get in a dogfight. Oftentimes, pilots didn't come back. The crew chiefs really–it was pretty tough.

Seney: What was the duty like in England? Did you get off base much and get to socialize much?

Bianchi: Well, yeah, we got off base a little, but the town was pretty small. Lymington is not a very big town. There wasn't an awful lot to do there except go down to the pub and have a few beers or something.

Seney: Local girls not available?

Memories of D-Day

Bianchi: We weren't really there long enough. We got there in April and of course D-Day was in June.

Seney: Do you remember D-Day? You must remember it.

Bianchi: Oh yes.

Seney: Tell me about your recollections of it.

Bianchi: Well, I happened to be sergeant of the guard that night, and I had to get all the pilots up and get them ready to have their breakfast and get in the planes.

Seney: Did you know it was D-Day?

Bianchi: No I didn't. I didn't know what was going on.

Seney: Just another day.

Bianchi: Yeah. I just figured it was a bombing mission, that they were going to escort maybe some bombers, or maybe go strafe something.

"In fact, I didn't know it was D-Day until they came back from their mission. . . .I guess we may have had an inkling that something was going on, because the bombers just kept–wave after wave of bombers went over that day."

In fact, I didn't know it was D-Day until they came back from their mission. It was a pretty well kept secret, I guess.

Seney: What did they say when they got back?

Bianchi: They told us about what they saw over on the beaches and it was pretty bad. They didn't seem to have any trouble. They all went on the mission and came back. They escorted the bombers over. I guess we may have had an inkling that

something was going on, because the bombers just kept–wave after wave of bombers went over that day.

Seney: Much more activity than usual, huh?

"I had indicated that I was interested in seeing what was going on over there after D-Day. . . . So he said, "Why don't you come along?" So we left the parachute out so there was room for me . . ."

Bianchi: Yeah, yeah. My pilot said he had a problem with the engine that day. He had an oil leak or something. I can't even remember what it was now. Anyway, I don't know whether he wanted to be sure that I had fixed it right or what, but you know a P-47 is just a one-seater thing, and I had indicated that I was interested in seeing what was going on over there after D-Day. This was about "D" plus five or something like that. So he said,

"Why don't you come along?" So we left the parachute out so there was room for me, he sat on my lap, and we flew that thing. If the CO [commanding officer] had known about it, we'd both be in Leavenworth right now I think! (laughter) But that was quite a thrill to go up and fly over the beaches.

Seney: Describe what you saw.

Bianchi: Well, things were still burning. On "D" plus five there was a lot of things burning, and a lot of abandoned equipment.

Seney: Ours? Theirs? Both?

Bianchi: Both, I guess. I think mostly ours, probably. It was quite a sight.

Seney: How low to the ground did you get?

Bianchi: We didn't get down very low. (chuckles) In fact we didn't go in very far, we could see it from a distance. We didn't really go over the–I don't think I could say we were over the continent. We were still out over the Channel.

Seney: Is that the only time he ever took you up for a ride?

Bianchi: Yeah. Well, it wasn't allowed you know.

Seney: I can understand why! (laughs heartily) You know, a one-seater plane, when you have to take the parachute out and have him sit on your lap: somehow that doesn't seem like standard procedure!

Bianchi: I guess maybe that gave him a lot of confidence in what I was doing. I was willing to up after I'd

worked on the airplane.

Seney: Well, that's fascinating.

Bianchi: It was very interesting. Of course there were other planes in the air you know. We'd see one go by and he'd say, "Oh, that's a friendly plane." (laughter) Of course we all had to be pretty well-versed in silhouettes of planes, but then some of the British planes, the silhouette, and some of *ours* too, were very much like the German silhouettes. You had to be sure of the distinguishing characteristics.

Seney: At what point did the operation move to France?

Moved on to France about Twenty Days after D-Day

Bianchi: I don't remember exactly but it must have been maybe "D" plus maybe twenty. It wasn't too long

after.

Seney: How was that?

Bianchi: Well, it was scary because the airfield that the engineers had prepared for us wasn't that far away from the front lines. We could hear the big guns going off–they weren't too far away. I don't remember that we ever got bombed–we got strafed a few times and lost a few planes on the line. After a while, it was just an every-day occurrence and you had to . . . It wasn't like being on the front lines. (Seney: Yeah.) It was a little scary.

Seney: Was there a lot of work to do? Did you work long hours?

Bianchi: Not especially–depending on what type of

problems you might of had with the airplane. But if we maintained them, they didn't seem to give them much trouble. We may have to change an engine once in a while: a lot of that was done maybe at night, if the engine got shot up or damaged in some way.

Seney: At what point did you move into Germany?

Bianchi: Well, from the Peninsula, after we'd been up north, we went down to the southern part of France into Lyon where Lyon, France, is. And we were down there, I guess, about the time of the Battle of the Bulge. That was in December. I suppose maybe–the way these dates are–they're gone, but I think we moved into Germany maybe about February or so.

Seney: Was it a German air base you moved into or did the engineers make you . . .? It had been a German air base?

Bianchi: Some of them were German air bases. I think probably most of them were.

Seney: But that was probably just pretty mopping up by that time? And was there a lot of activity then?

Bianchi: There was still quite a bit of activity. See, they didn't give up until May. We were moving right behind. I think we were behind Patton's Third Army.

Seney: So by this time you're attached to Patton's Third Army and providing tactical support in the advance?

Bianchi: Yeah. Uh-huh.

Seney: You must remember Armistice Day when the Germans quit.

Bianchi: Yeah. I don't remember there was any big thing. By that time it was getting pretty evident that it was going to be over soon.

Seney: Did you get out into Germany . . . .

END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1.
BEGINNING OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1.

Seney: I was asking you if you got out into the German towns much before the armistice period. I'm kind of curious about what you saw, what was going on.

Bianchi: No. No, we didn't. I think the reason being, we were kept pretty busy, and as the front lines moved up, we moved up behind them, and we were either maintaining the airplanes or tearing

down camp and putting up camp and that sort of thing.

Seney: On these German air bases you took over, did you ever run into any German airplanes? Did you get a chance to look at those?

Bianchi: Oh, only the wreckages. There were some wreckages we . . .

Seney: You never got a sense of how good they were? Did you look them over with kind of a little professional interest?

Bianchi: No, but we knew they were pretty darn good. Their airplanes were–they gave our boys a good run for their money when they were in a dogfight. Of course you won some and you lost some.

Seney: How would you, overall, assess your experiences

in World War II?

Bianchi: Well, as I told somebody once before, I'm a slow learner and it took me almost five years to learn I was a conscientious objector. (laughter) But in view of some of these other wars, I'm glad I had *that* experience, rather than some other, but I think it goes without saying that nobody ever wins a war. Sure, we came out ahead, but there was a lot of losses: human losses, losses of resources. That's the thing that always gets me is all the resources: all the gasoline that's burned, (sigh) all the materials that go into munitions, all of the resources that are wasted in machinery. What couldn't we do with all those resources if we put them to some other use?

Seney: When did you come back from Europe? How long after the Armistice did you stay there?

Returned to the States in August 1945

Bianchi: Almost right away. Well, I shouldn't say right away, because it was in August. The war was over in May, and from there we moved back to–I don't remember what they called them–but places where we rested up, places for R&R.[3] Our outfit came back on the Queen Mary in August, and that's when the big bomb was dropped in Japan. We were coming back and we were going to be on thirty days' delay en route. We were supposed to re-group in Colorado and then we were going to go overseas in the Pacific. Well, in the

3. R&R is variously defined as "rest and relaxation," "rest and recuperation," and "rest and recreation."

meantime, bombs dropped and they had a point system whereby we could be discharged if you had the proper amount of points–so many points for length of service, and so many points for overseas –that sort of thing. And so I was discharged in September of that year.

Seney: What did you do after your discharge?

Went to the University of Nevada on the GI Bill

Bianchi: Well, I started preparing my–I had always wanted to go to college, and I never could afford it. My folks couldn't afford to send me, so I started investigating the GI Bill of Rights and I went to school on the GI Bill.

Seney: Where did you go to school?

Bianchi: I went to school up here at the University of

Nevada.

Seney: With the GI Bill, did it pay all your books and tuition, for one thing?

Bianchi: Yes.

Seney: And they gave you something per month?

Bianchi: Yes, and a stipend per month, yeah.

Seney: How much per month, do you remember?

Bianchi: I think it was something like seventy-five dollars.

Seney: You could get by on that?

Bianchi: Yeah. Had to eat in the university commons, which left something to be desired sometimes. (laughter)

Seney: Kind of like military food?

Bianchi: Sort of.

Seney: Was the campus pretty crowded with people like

you?

Bianchi: There were a lot of veterans, uh-huh: some that had already started and came back. I don't think there was an awful lot of freshmen veterans. I'd never . . .

Seney: You were only a high school graduate though.

Bianchi: Yeah, uh-huh. And I'd been out of school for ten years. . . go back.

Seney: So at this point, you're what, twenty-five years old?

Bianchi: Right.

Seney: What was the atmosphere of the campus like? I mean you guys were a little older, you had a lot of experiences under your belt that normal students wouldn't have had.

Bianchi: Yeah. Well we didn't get the normal freshmen hazing (both chuckle) that they used to. I'd say it was a little crowded, because they didn't have the buildings, they didn't have the facilities, and they had to bring in makeshift housing. And I think the normal college population kind of looked at us, at the veterans, a little askance–they weren't sure that we were the same . . . (Seney: Species or something?) (laughter) Yeah, we were all older. (Seney: Yeah.) Even those that had already started and came back.

Seney: Did you know what you wanted to major in when you started?

Bianchi: No, I didn't.

Seney: Do you remember your first days on campus?

Bianchi: Um, not too well. I guess . . .

Seney: Well, let me try to suggest it must have been, after all these in the military in the war, it must have been quite a change.

Bianchi: It was, yeah. It was still kind of–not exactly a military atmosphere, but it was living in one of the halls up there, still had to have lights out at a certain hour and if you went off campus, you had to be back by a certain hour. (Seney: Even for someone of your age?) Which I don't think too many people adhered to, but you're *supposed* to be. (laughter) I understand the women's dorms were pretty strict that way–they had to be back in. If they didn't get back at the right time, why, the doors were locked and you had to explain why

they weren't back. So if you went out on a date, you always had to make sure you got *her* back in time. (laughter)

Seney: Do you remember any of your classes?

Started in Mechanical Engineering and Then Switched to Mathematics

Bianchi: Yeah, I decided I wanted to major in–I started out, I wanted to major in mechanical engineering. And after a while, I decided that was going to take me more than four years and I was anxious to get out and get going, so I changed my major to mathematics. I should have had better advice, I think, from my advisor. I don't know whether they thought "because these guys are veterans they ought to know what they want and I'm not

going to argue with them," or whatever, but I didn't get much advice from my advisor about what was out there and whether or not mathematics would earn me a living, which I found out I was probably twenty years too soon to get into the world with a degree in mathematics. (Seney: Yeah.) But that's the way it was. So I went through it and came out as a mathematics major with a minor in physics, and in fact I had a couple of minors: I had a minor in German, and a minor in physics.

Seney: When did you graduate?

Graduated in 1951

Bianchi: In 1951, I guess, is when I graduated.

Seney: And what did you do after you graduated?

Worked for His Sister Transcribing Court Cases for a Few Months

Bianchi: Well, for a few months, my sister was a court reporter and she used to take the court cases on these little cylinders–you're probably familiar with those. (Seney: Yeah.) And then you play them back on a machine and you type them up. Well I taught myself how to type and she had such a workload that she gave me a job helping her out typing up these court cases. Here in Nevada they were mostly divorce cases.

Seney: Oh that's right, the divorce laws were very different here than elsewhere. (Bianchi: Yeah.) Any interesting ones you remember?

Bianchi: No, I don't really remember 'em. Just more or less typed.

Seney: Well, you didn't really need to have grounds in Nevada did you, to have a divorce?

Graduated from College in 1951 but Went to Work for Reclamation as an Engineering Aide in 1950

Bianchi: Not really. As long as you'd been here six weeks or somebody *swore* that you'd been here six weeks (laughter), that's all it took. Then I found that the Bureau of Reclamation was hiring, and of course I had a preference because I was a veteran, so I went to work for the Bureau as a GS-2.

Seney: When did you start with the Bureau?

Bianchi: I graduated in 1951, but I went to work for the Bureau in 1950. Must have graduated in 1950. January of 1950 is when I graduated.

Seney: And so after a couple of months of helping your sister out, the Bureau job came along?

Bianchi: Yeah, as an engineering aid, GS-2.

Seney: What did you do as an engineering aid?

Bianchi: Mostly records, working up records of streamflows, reducing survey notes, things like that.

Seney: What does that mean, "reducing survey notes"?

Bianchi: Well, working out the angles and distances and whatever. Depends on whatever they were surveying.

Seney: What would they have been surveying?

Did Office Prep Work on Surveys and Worked in the Lab

Bianchi: They were surveying probably canals and ditches, that sort of thing. In the early years, I wasn't really too sure what they *were* doing at that time. Later we were also–I was helping in the lab where

they were testing water and testing soils–that sort of thing.

Seney: Where did you work?

Worked in Fallon Briefly

Bianchi: This was in Fallon. The office was in Fallon at that time.

Seney: When did the office move to Carson City?

Office Moved to Carson City from Fallon in 1951

Bianchi: In 1951. So I was only there for a short time.

Seney: You were just there briefly. Why did they move the office to Carson City?

Bianchi: I think because at that time they were beginning to look at these different projects; the project on the Carson River and the projects on the Truckee River. And as I understand it, the office was in

Carson City, originally, years ago, and I don't know when it moved to Fallon. But then it moved back to Carson City.

In Fallon Worked Closely With TCID

Seney: Did you work, in that period in Fallon, particularly closely with TCID [Truckee-Carson Irrigation District] or was there no difference because it was in Fallon?

Bianchi: Yeah we did. I think we were working pretty closely with them. We weren't there very long. I think we moved to Carson in September.

Seney: What were your first impressions of the Bureau when you went to work for them?

Bianchi: Well, I don't know whether I had much of an impression.

Seney: Do you remember your first day on the job, your first week or so, what it seemed like to you?

Didn't Like the Boss

Bianchi: Well, I wasn't too fond of the boss. I wasn't sure how long I was going to stay on that job.

Measured Streamflow on the Truckee River and Its Tributaries

That was another thing, another one of my jobs was to go out with somebody else to measure streamflows up on Truckee River and so forth.

Seney: How do you measure streamflows?

Bianchi: You go out with a stop watch and some equipment that measures has a little cup on it and measures the flow and you have a headphone and you count the clicks and you measure on the stop watch and you write all that down. That's another

thing we had to do was work up all those records. And you move across the stream at different locations and take those measurements, and the depths of the water, and by that, you can come up with streamflow.

Seney: How many cubic feet per second is . . .

Bianchi: Per second, right.

Seney: Can you explain to me what a "miner's inch" is?

Bianchi: Um, not exactly, but I know it's a term that was used I think . . .

Seney: It's a water measurement term.

Bianchi: Yeah. If you're really interested, I can probably find a book that would explain that.

Seney: Well, I'm going to have to find a definition[4] of it.

4. A unit of measure of water flow, varying with locality but often a flow equaling 1.5 cubic feet per minute. (*Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*.)

I've run across it and I think I should know what it means.

Bianchi: I don't know if I can put my finger on it, but I probably got it in the back room.

Seney: Yeah, down at the Bureau headquarters, even, they'll have something. So you measured streamflows and all of this is for what purpose?

Bianchi: Develop flow records at different points.

Seney: Was this on the Little Upper Truckee or was this in anticipation of the Washoe Project and Boca Reservoir and all that?

Bianchi: Yes it was. We measured the main stream of the Truckee, we measured several tributaries to the Truckee, we measured Little Truckee, we measured Prosser Creek, several tributaries to

those, up higher. I found that quite interesting work, because it was all outside. I was always with somebody. (Seney: Pretty country?) Yeah.

Seney: Well, can you explain to me what the purpose of the Washoe Project and the Prosser Creek and all of these . . . what was the Bureau's thinking in terms of those projects?

Washoe Project and Prosser Creek

Bianchi: The original Washoe Project authorization was to develop M&I water for . . . (Seney: "M&I" meaning?) Municipal and industrial water for the Truckee Meadows area and to supplement the agricultural water in the area. That never did come about, of course. As you probably know,

the lawsuits came into play, and this year especially, all the water from Stampede Reservoir went down to–or at least most of it–went down to Pyramid Lake for the cui-ui fish.

Seney: Well, there has been a great change, hasn't there, in the way the water has been allocated (Bianchi: Yes.) since you began with the Bureau, and certainly before that.

Seney: You know these projects we just mentioned, the Prosser Creek and the Stampede Reservoir and so forth: my understanding is that maybe in the initial phases way back in 1902 and earlier that the old U.S. Reclamation Service, beginning in 1902, and the Geological Survey which may be a little optimistic about how much water would end

up in the Truckee Canal, is that so do you think?

Limited Records Suggested There Was More Water Available in the Truckee River than Was the Case

Bianchi: I think so, yeah. The records in those days supported that. There was a series of real wet years in the 1860s, and if my memory serves me right, in the early 1900s there were some pretty wet years.

Seney: And they did their flow tests unfortunately during those periods?

Bianchi: Yeah. They used those to support their–that was before the drought of the 1920s.

Seney: Yeah.

Bianchi: And when that happened, of course it changed a lot of things. The criteria for the project then

became–the 1928-1932 drought was used as a standard for determining how much water was being needed to supplement to cover those years.

Seney: Is that a more realistic standard do you think?

Bianchi: More realistic than they were using. And now I understand this drought is even worse than the 1928-1932.

Seney: Well, we're still in this drought. This last year was a very, very bad year and with more use and demand . . .

Bianchi: Well, last year was a pretty good year. Years before . . . .

Seney: I'm thinking of this . . . .

Bianchi: This year is starting out bad. This last year's . . . .

Seney: I think we're saying the same thing, yeah. Yeah,

the winter just past was not a very good one. The year *before* was a very heavy winter.

Bianchi: Right. And I've often said that this last year, when we had the heavy snowfall, was similar to the 1932 year of the other drought. You know, everything was dry from 1928-1932. Nineteen thirty-two [1932] was a big year then they went into another drought until about 1938, when they came out of it. Had one of those years that produces a lot of snow in the middle of a drought, and everybody says, "The drought's over!"

"They forget that we live in the desert and we'll *always* be in a drought. . . ."

They forget that we live in the desert and we'll *always* be in a drought.

Seney: I was going to ask you, is that your view?

Bianchi: Yeah, we're always going to be short of water.

Seney: Later we'll talk about some of the general problems of the project, but you began measuring streamflows. Just give me a sense of how your responsibilities and so forth, working in the project progressed over the years–what you did from year to year.

Bianchi: You mean the evolution of my . . .

Seney: Right. And don't worry about being too detailed, I want to hear *more*, rather than less.

Had the Opportunity to Go on Snow Surveys with the Forest Service

Bianchi: Well, when we moved to Carson City, then I continued going out with these fellows and measuring streamflow and also had the opportunity at that time to be one of the ones that

went out with the Forest Service when they went out on snow surveys. At that time, we did a lot of measurements at the sites. Now they're doing most of it by remote control. But we'd did it on snow shoes and skies, and go out and measure the snow in the winter time. And then in the winter time, mostly, our work was inside, reducing all these notes and coming up with records.

Seney: And projections on what the flow would likely be, based on your observations?

Bianchi: Yeah. And as time went on, I also got into–I may be getting a little ahead of the story here, but after we'd been in Carson City for a while, I began to think, "Well, I'm not sure if this is what I want to do the rest of my life."

Went out Looking for Other Jobs and Left Reclamation Briefly

So I went out and looked at several other jobs. In fact, I took one job as a physicist in Tooele, Utah. I left the Bureau briefly for a couple of months.

Seney: Who did you work for there?

Bianchi: Department of the Army.

Seney: What were they doing over there that they needed a physicist?

Bianchi: They were doing a lot of testing. As I found out later, there was . . . You're probably aware of the problems they had with the gas escaping (Seney: Right.) and the sheep kills and all that. Well I didn't get in on any of that, but I soon learned that I didn't want to do *that* either.

Seney: That was kind of a biological weapons testing

center, wasn't it?

Went Back to Reclamation in 1952

Bianchi: Uh-huh. And so I got in touch with some Bureau office back here again and they said, "Well, if you want to come back, we can take you back." So I came back.

Seney: What year was that?

Bianchi: I think that was . . . 1952? I hadn't been with the Bureau very long.

Worked on Surveying Prosser Creek Basin

I came back in 1952 and at that time, they were surveying Prosser Creek and I worked on that–went up and did some surveying at Prosser Creek.

Seney: When you say you're surveying Prosser Creek, is

all that done in a pretty established fashion, the method of surveying? Or did you run into peculiar problems and things that you had to adjust for and overcome, or is it a kind of a textbook exercise in surveying?

Bianchi: I think it's pretty much a textbook exercise, although we were surveying the basin as a reservoir, and I don't remember any particular problems.

Seney: How long does something like that take?

Bianchi: I think I worked on Prosser Creek survey maybe a year-and-a-half. We were surveying the basin and we also surveyed the alignment for a power plant, for the generating plant, and so forth.

Seney: Who decides where the dam is going to be? Is

this the geologists come up, and the engineers. You'all involved with that too?

Bianchi: No, I wasn't involved in any of that. Most of *that* work comes from Denver. After the project offices have done the surveys and taken soil samples, somebody comes out and they look it over and decide where a good site might be, which is determined by the geography of the area, where it may narrow down and where might be the best place to put a dam with the least cost. And then of course we do the soil samples and the surveys. The design goes to Denver.

Seney: They do all that design work in Denver? (Bianchi: Uh-huh.) Does the survey occur *after* they've decided where the dam is going to be,

then you go out and survey?

Bianchi: Yeah, uh-huh. Well, probably the dam has not been determined exactly, but the general area, and *that* is surveyed, and then from *that* a determination is made where they might want to have additional borings taken for where the dam is going to be.

Seney: Is that interesting work, surveying for a dam site?

Survey Work on Stampede Reservoir

Bianchi: I enjoyed it, yeah. I also did quite a bit of the surveying on Stampede Reservoir.

Seney: Where did you learn this surveying? Did they teach you that, or had you learned that in school?

Bianchi: No, I just picked that up by being on a survey crew to begin with, and then working with it.

Seney: Now these were not authorized until maybe 1956 is the legislation that authorizes the Washoe Project? So this is preliminary work?

Bianchi: I was thinking maybe 1952 was the original authorization, but I may be wrong.

Seney: Maybe for the design phase. (Bianchi: Yeah.) Because it comes in phases, does it not? First the design phase, and then the construction phase: Once the design phase is completed, the construction phase is then authorized to be carried out. (Bianchi: Yeah, I think that was probably '56.) Did you also help supervise the construction of those projects?

Always Worked in the Planning Phase of Projects

Bianchi: No. No, I was always in the planning phase of the

projects.

Seney: Did you spend all your time in the planning phases of the projects?

Bianchi: Yeah.

Seney: What did you do after surveying Stampede up there?

Survey Work for a Project in Hope Valley on the Carson River

Bianchi: Um, one other project that we were surveying for was on the Carson River and I worked on that too, surveying. That was before I worked on Stampede, actually. We were surveying there in the anticipation of a reservoir going in in Hope Valley. And we surveyed a penstock for a potential drop down back to the river for power.

Seney: You mean there was a plan to dam Hope Valley?

(Bianchi: Uh-huh.) And that's what, the East Fork . . . .

END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1.
BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 2.

My name is Donald Seney and I'm talking with Monte Bianchi at his home in Carson City and it's June 15, 1994.

Seney: I was asking you about the plans to dam up Hope Valley. What happened to those plans? I guess I'm asking because I frequently drive through that lovely area and I can't imagine a dam being there. I'm just curious as why it didn't go forward.

There Was Opposition to the Hope Valley Project

Bianchi: Well, besides the opposition, I think there's–you know you have to sell a project, and to sell that project you needed the people down in the valley to subscribe to water, to use the water. Well,

there was quite a bit of opposition down in the valley–not only the Friends of Hope Valley, but those down in the valley that would be using the water. Some of the big ranchers, they didn't want the project. Some of the smaller ranchers, sure, they could use additional water, but the big ranchers, for some reason, were opposed to it.

Seney: When we talk about the valley, do mean the Carson Valley would have been the beneficiary of it?

Bianchi: Yes, the farms in the Carson Valley.

Seney: Are you familiar with Kinney Reservoir up at the top of Ebbetts Pass [in Alpine County, California]?

Bianchi: I know where it is, yeah.

Alpine Decree Lists Private Reservoirs That Flow into Nevada

Seney: Apparently there are farmers down in the Carson Valley who own the water rights to that and every fall it's drained for their alfalfa fields. It's kind of interesting.

Bianchi: There are several reservoirs up in both the east and west for . . . owned.

Seney: Apparently, that is individually-owned and has been for a number of years.

Bianchi: Yeah, all of them. I say all of them, PG&E [Pacific Gas and Electric] has some interest in some of them, some of them that drain the other way. (Seney: Yeah.) Yeah, those that drain this way, I'm pretty sure all are individually-owned. And they're listed in the Carson Decree.

Seney: In the Alpine Decree?

Bianchi: Alpine Decree.

Seney: Ah! Well I'll look for that in there.

Bianchi: The rights are listed in the back of it.

Seney: Because that's all part of the Carson watershed, that Alpine Decree. (Bianchi: Yes.) It defines who has prior claims in *that* watershed. (Bianchi: Uh-huh.) Well, I've just gotten a copy of that, and the other decree, the Orr Ditch Decree, and I'm trying to study those and understand them. And for someone who isn't conversant with these things, it's difficult to get a grasp, (Bianchi: Yeah.) because it *is* a very complicated field isn't it?

Bianchi: Yes, the Orr Ditch Decree, especially, is a little

complicated the way it's supposed to be operated.

Seney: Yeah. Well, that's the Federal watermaster who takes care of that and who presumably understands what everyone's rights are. In fact, just this week they have closed down the ditches from the Boca Reservoir because of (Bianchi: Day before yesterday.) Right, because of a lack of water, and that's *his* determination to make, I guess based on these (Bianchi: Forecasts.) and the divisions of the rights made in the Orr Ditch Decree.

Bianchi: Yes.

Hope Valley Project

Seney: Yeah. If we could go back to the Hope Valley thing again, did you have anything to do with

trying to sell that project or the–I don't want to say "politics of it," because I don't mean that in the sort of *narrow* sense . . .

Bianchi: I know what you mean. No.

Seney: Because I'm interested in anything you could tell me about the kind of–broadly speaking–the politics of that project and how one of these projects *doesn't* get sold.

Bianchi: Yeah, I'm not sure who was responsible for that. They go out and . . . I believe there might have been . . . some kind of an election made that was done by . . . I think the name of it is Carson-Truckee Subconservancy District. They were responsible for determining, as near as they could, from the people involved in the valley, whether or

not the project was feasible. And of course we put a lot of faith in what they had to say. (Seney: Yeah.) After we did all the surveying and everything, it just never did go anywhere.

Seney: Does the Bureau take a kind of neutral stance in this, and say, essentially, "Here's the potential dam site, so we can store a certain amount of water. You folks down here can use it. You want it or don't you want it?"

Bianchi: Yeah. At least they're *supposed* to be neutral. They're not supposed to be out actively selling or . . .

Seney: Does that happen sometimes, though, do you think?

Bianchi: Well, I think many individuals might–not

officially, but at a party, you might be talking about, "This is a good project, you ought get behind it." Kind of like that. But it's supposed to be neutral, yeah. I think most of the time it was.

Seney: Yeah. I guess when the Newlands Project began, that was sold pretty heavily by the U.S. Reclamation Service wasn't it?

Bianchi: I think so, uh-huh.

Seney: Yeah. My reading indicates that were some disappointments with the promises made by the Reclamation Service, that things didn't work out as advertised.

Bianchi: I'm sure there was, especially by the Indians that are *on* the Carson River side that had irrigation rights that were never developed for them. It was

supposed to be–and I don't know the details of that–but I know that that was one of the . . .

Seney: Was this the Walker River Indians?

"My personal feeling is, they should have developed a Newlands Project with Carson River water alone, instead of bringing water from the Truckee River over. That's what's caused all the problems. . . ."

Bianchi: No. (Seney: The Carson?) I don't know if they have a name, but they're down at the end of the project, and they had so much land that there were some trade-offs made that were . . . (Seney: Not to their advantage?) Not to their advantage. And I have to say this in retrospect, you know, I went to work for the Bureau and I did get interested in what the Bureau was doing because as a native Nevadan, I thought they were doing some good

things for agriculture and that sort of thing, which I think has changed a lot now. I suppose *I* felt that maybe these projects would be a good thing, and also I realized that the Newlands Project was providing an economy for that area, but in retrospect, I have to say that somebody really goofed when they built the Newlands Project. My personal feeling is, they should have developed a Newlands Project with Carson River water alone, instead of bringing water from the Truckee River over. That's what's caused all the problems. I'm sure you've read how many–I think eighty–feet that Pyramid Lake has dropped since the Newlands Project was developed. (Seney: Yeah.) That's because the water went to the

Newlands Project instead of Pyramid Lake. Well, *now* there's an economy down there, and what's happening, because they're taking water and *sending* it to Pyramid Lake, they're ruining an already established economy to support another one, which probably should never have been developed that way to begin with.

Seney: Would there have been enough water on the Carson River to support the Newlands Project?

Bianchi: Not in its present shape or configuration, (Seney: A smaller one.) but it didn't have to be that big.

Seney: Yeah.

Bianchi: There's a lot of acreage down there now that's got water rights, that's never been irrigated. And in fact, as I think I read somewhere, in the early

days, they had envisioned an even much bigger project than what's there now.

Seney: Twice as big. (Bianchi: Yeah.) More than twice as big. (Bianchi: Yeah.)

Seney: Well the Carson River is relatively undeveloped compared to Truckee, isn't it, when you look at the storage facilities upstream–the storage facilities on the Truckee, as opposed to the Carson River.

Bianchi: Yeah, that's one thing I was going to say about the development on the Carson River: We were never actively involved in *selling* that project, but of course most of us thought it would be a good project.

Seney: This is the Hope Valley Project?

Bianchi: Not necessarily the Hope Valley. I think the Hope Valley was always kind of on the border line with the Watasheamu Dam on the East Fork. [It] would have been the one that would have helped the farmers in the Carson Valley area.

Seney: Where would that dam have been built?

Seney: It would have been built . . . Well the reservoir would have straddled the California-Nevada state line. It would have been, I think, if memory serves me right, it's about seven miles from Gardnerville, upstream from Gardnerville (Seney: I see.) is where the dam would be, and then of course the reservoir would have flooded both the Nevada portion and California portion of the river.

Seney: And that, you think, would have been a workable dam to support the Newlands Project out of Carson River water flowing into the Lahontan Reservoir?

Bianchi: It wouldn't have been designed for that. It was designed for supplemental irrigation in the Carson Valley.

Seney: Ah, okay.

Bianchi: So I don't think it would have benefitted the Newlands Project at all. Incidentally, it might have.

Seney: Are you suggesting the Newlands Project probably shouldn't have been built to begin with?

Bianchi: Not to the extent that it is. (Seney: Yeah.) Because they depended on–*half* their water comes

from the Truckee River, or did. So if they had had the foresight or the compassion for the Indians' problems . . . (Seney: Yeah.) And of course the Indians had no voice, nobody made any waves for *their* benefit at the time.

Seney: It's only been in recent years that there's been some movement to give the Indians back the water for Pyramid Lake.

Bianchi: Uh-huh. And that's the tragedy of it, because you've got an already established economy in the Newlands Project, and if things go the way they *want* them to go, all the water's going to eventually end up in Pyramid again. A lot of those farmers are going to have to sell out, go somewhere else. (Seney: Yeah.) So, eventually

it may *become* a project that's going to survive only with Carson River water–I don't know.

Seney: That's very interesting.

Bianchi: The water that goes over to the Newlands Project, there *is* what they call the Truckee Bench. Now that could have been developed from the Truckee River.

Seney: Where is that located?

Bianchi: It's in the Fernley area.

Seney: That's further up from than Newlands? It's closer to Derby Dam, isn't it?

Bianchi: Well, yeah, it gets water from the Derby Dam and the Truckee Canal.

Seney: That's pretty fertile there isn't it in that farming area?

Bianchi: Well, I guess.

Seney: More than what's down around Fallon?

Bianchi: I don't think so.

Seney: No?

Bianchi: They have some problems on the Truckee Bench; sandy soils and . . . .

Seney: Because those are benchlands rather than bottomlands.

Bianchi: Yeah.

Seney: Let's go back to what you were doing, because it's a good key to talk about these other problems. When you finished the survey for the potential reservoir at Hope Valley, which comes to nothing, what then did you do?

Bianchi: You mean outside of the Stampede and Prosser?

Seney: Yeah.

Bianchi: Well, it's about that time that we had a project manager that . . . Oh, before this, I guess I got interested in another job, so I went down to White Sands, New Mexico, to look at that–and I didn't like that. Of course I hadn't quit the Bureau yet by then. And I came back and the project manager realized that I was a little dissatisfied, not too happy with the way things . . .

Seney: What was the source of your dissatisfaction?

Manager Got Him Rated as an Engineer When Bianchi Wanted to Move Elsewhere

Bianchi: Well, here I'd gotten a college education–I didn't have a professional rating of any kind, and I still made, I think I'd gotten to GS-5 and I couldn't go any higher. So the project manager says, "I think

we can get you a professional rating as an engineer." He said, "You've had enough experience." Now this is 1955, I guess, and he went to work and did that.

Seney: So that put you in a whole new career path.

Water Supply Studies

Bianchi: Yeah, so I was a little happier then. I got interested in–we were doing water supply studies just with a calculator and an adding machine. I don't know how familiar you are with water supply studies, (Seney: Tell me about them.) but you take a streamflow, and a reservoir, and whatever other reservoirs, and . . . Well, in this case, on the Truckee River, the Orr Ditch Decree, and you do a study using that water and some

hypothetical acreages and some hypothetical demands and you work it through by hand to see what kind of shortages you're going to end up with, and whether it's feasible or not. Well, those water supply studies involved periods . . . Well, eventually we ended up using a fifty-year period. (sigh) Well, to do a fifty-year period with a calculator and an adding machine and big long worksheets about like that with all the reservoirs . . . (Seney: A few feet long?) Yeah. It used to take somewhere around maybe one-and-a-half or two man-years to do.

Seney: How long would it take now with a computer program?

Began to work on Applying Computers to Reclamation Needs

Bianchi: Computer, you'd do it (snaps fingers) like that. (laughter) So I was interested in computers, and so I started going to the regional office in Sacramento to work with some of the people in the computer division, and . . .

Seney: By the way, when did the Bureau start to get computers? Just about this time?

Bianchi: Oh yeah, somewhere around the middle 60s I guess. The first one I ever worked on was the IBM 1600, I guess they called it, which took up the better part of a room like this. It still took overnight to do maybe just the 40-year study. But eventually, we started using the mainframe in Denver, and what other facilities we had. And we were running these studies out pretty regular: Put

in a “what if?” and run it.

Seney: Did you have to write the programs for these things?

Bianchi: Yeah. I wrote the program for the Carson River and the Truckee River operation studies.

Seney: That must have been a fairly good challenge, I would think. Was it?

Bianchi: Oh yeah, it was a lot of fun. I spent a lot of time in Sacramento in those days.

Seney: Did you?

Bianchi: Yeah.

Seney: So you had to learn how to program.

Bianchi: Yeah. Only learned how to program in one language. That was all it took at that time.

Seney: Yeah. That’s interesting to think . . .

Bianchi: I think they're still using that program somewhere.

Seney: Is that right? How long did it take you to write the program?

Bianchi: Well, I didn't write the whole thing. It had to evolve. The original program, I don't know, maybe took me about a year, I guess, to write it and get the bugs out of it– and then kept adding on to it and different things.

Seney: Was the Bureau at all resistant to the introduction of computers? Or did people seem to recognize their value?

Bianchi: I don't think so. I think they really went for it. They saw the advantages.

Seney: Well, I suppose the Bureau has a lot of data it has

to manipulate, doesn't it?

Bianchi: Oh yeah.

Bianchi: I think they've got quite a computer division in Denver, and I *know* they do in Sacramento. They got rid of that big old 1620, and I don't know what they're using now, (chuckles) but I think they gained a lot of space when they got rid of it!

Seney: What did this mean for your career with the Bureau, to begin to work on computers in this way?

Bianchi: You mean what did I gain by it?

Seney: Yeah, exactly.

Bianchi: Well, I'll have to say I went from A GS-2, to begin with, to a GS-12 when I retired, so that was one reason I was able to work in this office for my

entire career.

Seney: That's very unusual isn't it?

Bianchi: As far as I know, yeah. I don't know of anybody else that spent their entire career in one office. Of course I guess you'd have to say I wasn't entirely in one office because, like I say, I spent a lot of time in Sacramento until we got a line into our office that we could do our computer work from. Whenever I had a "what if?" that I wanted to run on the computer, I'd go down there and run it. Now they can do it right here from a remote station.

Seney: Yeah, they're all linked together. Even the ones sitting on peoples desks could probably do the bulk of what used to be done on this room-sized

one. (Bianchi: Yeah, right.) It's amazing. And twenty years from now you'll have it in the palm of your hand and be able to do that instantaneously.

Bianchi: Yeah, if I hadn't been getting my raises and promotions since I went along, I probably would have moved to another office. (Seney: Yeah.) They came at the right time.

Seney: This getting into computers coincided with your boss saying to you, "Let's get you on the professional track"?

Bianchi: Well, no. We weren't looking at computers yet at that time, but he did get me a professional rating and I was doing a lot of the work in the office like these long water supply sheets.

Seney: It grew out of your frustration with the water supply sheets, did it? "There must be a better way than this!"

Bianchi: Yeah, that's right.

Seney: So you shifted mostly into, then, solving problems with computers and assisting other people with their problems?

Bianchi: Yeah, from then on that's about all I did was the computer end of the office's work–as far as water supply studies were concerned. That's all I delved in.

Seney: That's all you were concerned [with], were the water supply studies? (Bianchi: Yeah.) Did you find your studies were pretty accurate? Have you, over the years, think you've been able to project

pretty much what . . . .

Bianchi: I think so. Like I say, I think they're still using that program.

Seney: You know, in reading about the Newlands Project, I get somewhat the same feeling you do, and that is that some mistakes in judgment were made here in terms *of* the project itself. And one of the things that strikes me is one of the things that *you* had mentioned, and that is these rainfall numbers. Here they did the streamflows in these extraordinarily wet years, which is not unusual. I mean, this kind of mistake is made world-wide by people.

Bianchi: No. Nobody's at fault there, except–that's the records they had, and they used those records.

Seney: Would you say that this sense of frustration about the Newlands Project is maybe something that other people in the office shared too? The feeling that this doesn't seem to be working out.

Bianchi: You mean the frustration over whether it should have been built or not?

Seney: Yeah.

Bianchi: Well, I don't know. I think I've come to that conclusion *since* I retired.

Seney: Not while you were still on the job.

Bianchi: Not when I was still with the Bureau.

Seney: Yeah, yeah.

Bianchi: Because in my own mind, I thought these projects were–because I was a Bureau employee . . . (Seney: Sure.) I was quite upset with old Judge

[Gerhard A.] Gesell when he started talking about cutting the Newlands Project and sending water down to Pyramid Lake. I thought he was way off base. He doesn't know what it's like out here. He's sitting back there in Washington making these decisions, he doesn't know what's going on out here.

Seney: Do you think part of your feelings came from the fact that your father was an irrigation farmer?

Bianchi: Oh, definitely. I was *very* sympathetic with all the people in the Newlands Project. In fact, I almost got in trouble [at] one meeting of the Bureau people and the lawyers and TCID was having, because I happened to be talking to some of the TCID people and gave away some "secrets"

I suppose you might say, and the attorney at that time took me out in the hall and gave me a good lecture about I shouldn't be talking to those people about the things that we were planning to do.

Seney: Do you remember what you were talking to them about?

Bianchi: Ah, it's kind of vague, but it had something to do with how you could–different ways you could use the water and satisfy both the needs of the Newlands Project and also send water down through the fisheries.

Seney: Yeah. I guess your view kind of was that you had a cooperative relationship with TCID.

Bianchi: Oh yes, while *I* was with the Bureau: I think

that's deteriorated since. I don't think the Bureau has that.

Seney: Yeah. And the lawyer, was a Bureau lawyer from D.C.?

Bianchi: No, he wasn't from D.C., but he was with the Justice Department.

Seney: And he saw it very differently.

Bianchi: Yeah!

Seney: Overall, what is your evaluation of TCID?

Bianchi: Well, I think, like I said a while ago, I think it's bigger than it *needed* to be, but how do you decide now who's . . . I still have a brother that lives down there.

Seney: Does he farm in TCID?

Bianchi: Well, he has a farm but he doesn't do any farming

anymore. He rents the farm out, but he was complaining to me the other day that he's got some water rights that he's never been able to use because the land is not in a position where he can get water to it. And he said he thinks they're just going to take those water rights away from him. I have a little problem with that because . . .

Seney: Well, isn't there pressure from the Pyramid Lake Indians to do just that, (Bianchi: Yes.) take abandoned or unused water rights and revert them back?

Bianchi: But to just *take* them, that's where I have a problem. He bought that property. Whether he pinpointed those water rights or not, as an incentive to buy that (Seney: Yeah.) or not, that's

another matter, but at least he bought that property *with* those water rights. Now, I think he ought to be reimbursed for them if somebody's going to take them.

TCID

Seney: What I'd like you to do if you would Monte, is just give me your overall view of TCID, how you think it works and it's strengths and weaknesses. I mean obviously you've got, I won't say "a bias" here, but a perspective, being the son of a farmer and the brother of a TCID water user and all that, but I'd be interested, given your Bureau experience over the years, how you'd evaluate TCID.

Bianchi: Well, my Bureau experience has always been very

good with them. They've always cooperated with anything that I've been working on and never been any problems that I ever felt.

Seney: You know, one of the things about them in terms of the number of employees they have, they don't really employ ditchriders to open and close the gates: they leave that up to the individual farmers I understand it, to open and it to open and close . . . . (Bianchi: Pretty much, yeah.) Kind of an honor system I guess.

Bianchi: Well, yeah, I think they have a ditchrider that oversees that, though.

Seney: Do they?

Bianchi: Or *did* have.

Seney: Yeah. Do you think that the water usage might be

different over the years if the Bureau had maintained control over the project, rather than giving it over to the users to control?

Bianchi: I don't know that it *could* be any different because it's all set by a decree. I'm sure there's cases where people use more than their whatever, 4.5 or 3.5, whatever the decree calls for, but . . .

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Measuring the Water That Flows to the Newlands Project in the Truckee Canal

Seney: You Say TCID has adhered to the decree. There is, then, a way of measuring how much water goes into the Truckee Canal and gets down into the Newlands Project (Bianchi: Yeah.) from the Truckee Canal. (Bianchi: There's a staging

station right there that measures the water on a sheet that . . .) And sets the flow so that it's constant but will only allow in . . .

Bianchi: I think so. Somebody has to set the flow, but then there's a record of what goes by there. And I was going to mention, a while ago, when you said you didn't think they had a ditchrider. Well, I don't know that they had one per se, but I know if there's any complaints by one of the farmers somebody goes out there and measures the water going onto his place and that's . . .

Seney: Well, I guess your answer to my question is that if there were, as a matter of fact, shall we say a little bit of extra appropriation by the farmers that would show up. (Bianchi: Yes, it would.) I

mean, you would know that because there's this measured flow and some people would end up with none, in other words, down at the end of the canal.

Bianchi: Yeah. Of course the Truckee Canal goes into the [Lahontan Dam and] reservoir and then TCID operates the reservoir. (Seney: From which the water then flows.) Yeah, right.

Seney: But, I mean, they can't go over the allocation that comes down the Truckee Canal and is stored in the reservoir. Do you think that the district's been fairly well managed over the years?

Bianchi: I'd have to say, "Yes" I haven't any reason to believe otherwise. I've never been that close to their management needs, but the only contact I've

had very much with them is in these meeting where the lawsuits have been discussed and that sort of thing. But as far as their management is concerned, I'll have to say that Lyman McConnell is doing a good job or he wouldn't have been there as long as he has. And all the others that I've known ahead of him have always done good work as far as I know.

Seney: You know, it seems in reading about this that there really hasn't been a period almost from the beginning of the project [where] there haven't been lawsuits, pending lawsuits and watermasters, and so forth, making decisions about flows and all that sort of–is that generally true you think? (Bianchi: You say there hasn't . . .) There has *not*

been any period when there *hasn't* been lawsuits in effect and filed and so forth and so on. Do you think that's true.

Bianchi: True. From the inception of the project I think there's been somebody's always had some kind of a lawsuit going.

Seney: And there's no other mechanism to resolve this other than the courts, I guess. Apparently not, or if there is, it hasn't been found, I guess.

Bianchi: No, not unless people agree on the operations that are going on. Everybody seems to be–you know everybody's hot for, looking out for their own benefit. TCID wants water and so does Pyramid. It's pretty hard to give them both what they want.

Seney: You know, I want to ask you a little bit about

what it's been like to work for the Bureau. I mean, you mentioned twice you looked for other jobs–and then as long as you got on the professional track that took care of that problem. What was the Bureau like to work for and how many years did you work for the Bureau?

Worked for Reclamation for Thirty-one Years

Bianchi: I worked for the Bureau thirty years, I guess, from 1950 to 1980. I'd have to say thirty-one years because I worked one year as a re-employed annuitant. Once I got into something that I was interested in I found it a good outfit to work for.

Seney: How would you describe your fellow workers?

Bianchi: I've always had good rapport with all of them. I'm pretty easy to get along with. So . . .

Seney: Well, it's not uncommon . . .

Bianchi: Like I said . . . I think I said in the beginning that I wasn't too fond of my first boss. From there on, see, he left when we moved to Carson City. So I only knew him . . . I might have learned to like him if we'd been there long enough.

Seney: Who knows, if you'd had a chance. Where I work, let me say, that we all get along pretty well with one another, and we, you know, joke amongst ourselves and we have a good rapport, and we've all worked together for many years, and it's a very enjoyable situation in which to work. And, while it's not my place–maybe someday somebody will come along and interview me so I'm not going to give you a lot of

details about what I'm talking about here. Can you illustrate for me the pleasanter aspects of working at the Bureau, what makes it fun, what makes it interesting?

Bianchi: Well, I don't think anybody was too–I think everybody understood each others' job and if you needed help it was easy to ask somebody to spend a day or two helping you. I got a lot of satisfactions out of going down to the Sacramento office. Those guys down there were just *great*. I'd walk in after I'd been down there a few times and they'd right away say, "Well, what do you want to do today? What's your 'what if' question today? You need any help to set it up?" Just very pleasant.

Seney: You know one of the things I think makes for a pleasant working environment is that the people feel secure about their jobs (Bianchi: Oh sure.) and they're not worried and looking over their shoulder. Was this true do you think, that people felt secure about their jobs . . .

RIFs in the Office

Bianchi: I think so, yeah. There was a few times–I experienced a few times where one old fellow I used to work with called it a mule sale–you know, when there's supposed to be a reduction in force, R-I-F, but I don't think anybody got real tense about that either. I think a few people . . . I don't know that I know of anybody that lost their job from our office. I mean lost their jobs. They may

have been transferred somewhere else, which sometimes was maybe they might not have wanted to go there, but at least they had a job. I think most of the time when those RIFs came along there were jobs elsewhere. That may not be true now, but during my career I don't think there was ever a time when we were in such a bad depression or recession or whatever you wanted to call it that they either were willing to go out into the private sector and get a job or the Bureau had another job for them somewhere else.

Seney: Would you . . .

Bianchi: I think it was pretty much job security all the way along.

Seney: Would you notice much here in the project office

in Carson City when there would be a change in presidents and change in Secretaries of the Interior? Would that finally ripple down to Carson City and the project office.

". . . I think when Udall was the secretary of interior . . . that might have been the beginning of the time when the Bureau's objectives began to change a little. . . ."

Bianchi: No, I think we were always aware of it, and talked about what it meant to us . . . (Seney: I mean, something besides changing the pictures on the wall.) Yeah. (Seney: Do you remember any times when this had an impact and had a difference?) Well, I think when Udall was the secretary of interior he kind of had–that might have been the beginning of the time when the Bureau's objectives began to change a little. And,

I think it kind of vacillated even after he, I don't remember the progression of . . . (Seney: Well, he lasted eight years.) He lasted quite a while. (Seney: Through the Johnson administration. Yeah.) And I think it probably swung back and forth and . . . who was Secretary of the Interior when all these lawsuits came up. I don't remember now, but I think maybe Udall's about the only one that every made much of an impression as far as change was concerned, for me.

Seney: How about when regional directors would change in Sacramento? Would you feel that?

Bianchi: I don't think too much, no.

Seney: How do you account for that kind of consistency

when you'd have these upper level changes?

Even when the president and commissioner and regional directors changed, ". . . they weren't the ones that were doing the work, necessarily. They may have had some policy things to do, but as far as the work we were doing we still went ahead and did the same work. . . ."

Bianchi: Well, I don't know, they weren't the ones that were doing the work, necessarily. They may have had some policy things to do, but as far as the work we were doing we still went ahead and did the same work.

Role of Court Decrees on the Newlands Project

Seney: Would the controlling body there be more likely to be the local federal court and the Orr Ditch Case and the Alpine Decree, and what not that kind of set the limits of what went on and . . .

Bianchi: I don't think so. Because that decree supposedly

pretty much set in concrete that . . .

Seney: Well, that's what I mean, that kind of defines what can go on here.

Bianchi: Oh, yeah.

Seney: And it doesn't really matter if the regional director changes or if the president or secretary of interior, because you've got the court decrees that define everybody's rights and the flows and all that. And then I guess the gods if they decide to let it rain, right are the other factor?

Bianchi: Yeah. Yeah. But, of course, then policy began to change as far as the water is going to go–after Stampede was built.

Seney: Well that does begin with Udall, doesn't it? That change in–that's when the Bureau of Indian

Affairs begins to have a larger voice in the department of interior.

Views on Newlands Project and Indian Issues Have Changed since Retirement

Bianchi: So, although during the time why Udall was, shouldn't say an enemy, but he was going against the policies that I was familiar with. (Seney: A little grousing about Udall, you remember?) Yeah, he may have been. He was doing the right thing probably, and we didn't know it.

Seney: So, as you've said several times, your views have changed over the years since you've been retired–which is since 1980. (Bianchi: Um-hmm.) Yeah. Thought about it and view it a little differently than . . . what makes you come the conclusion, do you think, that you have?

Bianchi: Oh, I think maybe listening to the news and reading, analyzing it, giving it some thought. While I was working for the Bureau, of course, I had the Bureau's interests and the farmers; interests at heart. Though I still do, I can see where it might have been different years ago if things had been done differently.

Seney: I suppose, too, one of the differences is that you're not around other Bureau employees all the time and getting out [of] the kind of group culture and what you should think about these matters.

Worked in the Watermaster's Office Part Time for Several Years

Bianchi: And I guess maybe I didn't mention it, but after I retired I went to work in the watermaster's office, and I worked there six years, and I could see

different things that were happening that I didn't see when I was working for the Bureau.

Seney: What did you see over there that you didn't see working for the Bureau.

Bianchi: Well, I was more in tune with what the Indians needed–what their requests were and felt that maybe they had a right to be met–maybe not 100 percent, but I think they had some . . . although sometimes I wonder if it's really Indians that are making these requests or the attorneys that work for the Indians.

Seney: Apparently they have quite able legal assistance now.

Bianchi: Are you going to interview Mr. Pelcyger?

Seney: I'm going to try. I also want to talk to some of the

Indians themselves. Anyone over there you would recommend that I talk to?

Bianchi: Gosh, I don't even know who's there any more.

Seney: Well, I think Garry Stone would be helpful.

Bianchi: He probably would be, yeah. He'd help you there.

Seney: What did you do in the watermaster's office?

Bianchi: Just worked up records, more or less. I was only a part time employee, actually. I worked three days a week. Claude Dukes was the watermaster at the time.

Seney: Was Garry Stone in the office at the time.

Bianchi: He worked for the office, yeah. He was doing a lot of work down in the Carson Valley at the time. And Claude Dukes and I–we'd been in touch

quite a bit when I was with the Bureau.

Seney: Well, he was watermaster for a long time wasn't he?

Bianchi: Oh, yeah.

Seney: Is he still alive?

Bianchi: No. He died, and that's when Garry Stone took over. Garry and I were both working in the office when he died, and Garry was the natural successor.

Seney: Did you want the job?

Bianchi: Not really, no. I figured I was ready to retire completely. But then I worked for Garry for six years, I guess–four years.

Seney: Still doing records and . . . analyzing data and that kind of thing?

Bianchi: Yeah, and I set up their computer network for billing and sending notices. I guess that was my main job.

Seney: Well, as I look over these decrees if I run into some problems understanding them maybe I can call you and ask you. (Bianchi: Sure.) Because I know I'm going to run into problems trying to understand what they mean.

Bianchi: That was interesting to really get intimate with that Truckee River decree and Carson River decree. I won't say I'm not intimate with them yet, but . . .

Seney: Did they strike you as fair? Did the courts in dividing up all this very scarce resource do a good job you think?

Bianchi: Well, yeah, under the circumstances. If you ignore the premise of maybe Newlands shouldn't have been built to the extent that is. Yeah, under that premise I would say . . .

Seney: What little I know about these decrees is that it seems to be that it was a daunting task for the court through its [water]masters to try to come to some Solomon-like decision over what to do with this water. You know, I mean it's . . . and I don't know who would have been better able to make the decision–the parties at interest I don't think could have worked it out amongst themselves. There was too much . . . well, I just don't think they could have, and I don't know that the Congress could have done a better job. Or the

state legislatures of Nevada and California would have done a better job. I guess I offering the conclusion as I go along here, but I'm really supposed to be asking you a question and the question is: can you think of anyone who could have done it better than the courts did it. Who you might have wanted to make this decision.

Bianchi: Well, I think the courts did it with the help of those interested parties (Seney: Sure.) without the help of the Indians down at the terminal end. I can see where the Indians were, I think, unfairly treated.

Seney: That is initially, not–now they're being better treated, but initially in the original . . . (Bianchi: Yeah.) They weren't represented in this litigation

really, to begin with.

Bianchi: I don't think so.

Seney: Yeah, right. It was the Bureau of Indian Affairs was somewhat *marginally* involved, but there would be those who would argue they didn't really represent the Indian's best interests either.

Bianchi: And that's been said.

Seney: Yeah, exactly. Well that's interesting that you've come to a different conclusion about this project and . . .

Bianchi: I hope my retirement is solid enough that I don't have to get in trouble over this.

Seney: No, I don't think anybody is going to take your retirement away from you. Because, you know, I think this is not a unique conclusion, frankly. I

think there are *other* people who have come to the very same conclusion that you have about this project. And I don't know that that's true about other Bureau of Reclamation projects. I mean, I don't know what people say about the many others that have been built . . .

Bianchi: Unless they have a user at the terminal end like they have on this. I don't know if this is unique or not, but it might be.

Seney: What do you mean when you say they have a user like this on the terminal end.

Bianchi: Well, if the Indians they're at the terminal end of the Truckee River.

Seney: Oh, I see, you mean the Pyramid Lake Indians. Yeah, I see what you mean. I thought you meant

TCID when you said that.

Bianchi: Oh, no. Well . . . I don't know what happened there. They were pretty badly treated too.

Seney: Well, it would be nice if there were more water, wouldn't it?

Bianchi: Yes, it would.

Seney: Couple more hundred thousand acre feet a year would take care of the problem. (Bianchi: Yeah.) Yeah, that the rub, it's so scarce and unpredictable.

Bianchi: A lot of people hat to admit that we live in a desert. This is a desert. (Seney: Yeah.) There's only so much water unless the good Lord decides to change the geography or . . . which he may well do.

Seney: That'll cause problems as well, won't it? Well, you know, I may want to come back later and ask you some more questions if I may–when I learn more (Bianchi: Yep.) about all of this. You know, you're helping me learn, and as I do more interviews those others will benefit from my discussions with you and Bob Whitney and some of the other people so it may be necessary for me to come back, and if it is, I'll give you a call and make arrangements. Thank you very much.

Bianchi: You're welcome.

END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 2. June 15, 1994.
END OF INTERVIEW.